



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT.<sup>1</sup>

Semitic philology is one of the very last studies to be taken up in this country. It is scarce a dozen years old. This may seem strange when we remember that Hebrew was a college study from the foundation of Harvard College, and for fifty years half a hundred professors have taught Hebrew in as many theological seminaries. But Hebrew was not studied as a language to be compared with other languages, but only exegetically, as a means of getting, or seeming to get, at the meaning of the Old Testament. It is true that in Moses Stuart we had, early in the century, a great scholar, who did more than any other man to introduce us to German erudition, but he left behind him no man that was his equal. With a very few distinguished exceptions, the Hebrew professor was not more than a fair translator, often not even that. We have laughed over the story of the Pennsylvania Dutch professor of Hebrew who spoke of it as the language which he had *siebenmal gelernt und siebenmal vergiesen*. When we pass beyond Hebrew nothing was known of any other Semitic language, except by a few very scholarly missionaries, like Dr. Van Dyck, the great Arabic scholar of Beirût, or Drs. Riggs and Schauffler, of Constantinople. I must not forget that Professor Murdoch, however, managed to translate the Syriac Peshitto into English, which was an unexampled feat. I do not remember that any one else, up to a few years ago, studied Arabic in this country, except Professor Salisbury, or was known to have learned Syriac, or that any Christian scholar had ever read any Talmudic.

This was very different from the case with Indo-Germanic studies, and the reason is not wholly obscure. Indo-Germanic philology became a science with the discovery of the Sanskrit, and our president, Professor Whitney, in his youth was attracted to the new study, and became the father of all such as read the Vedas. But Semitic philology could not easily be made a science, because no solvent like the Sanskrit had been found for its various tongues. Renan began a Comparative History of Semitic languages and dropped it at the end of the first volume. When I began the study of Hebrew I learned that the verb כפר *kaphar* was connected with the English *cover*, although *cover* is from the French *couvrir*, which is from the Latin *coopervire*, which is from *co* and *operio*, which is from *ob* and *pario*.

The decipherment of the Assyrian inscriptions gave us, as Dr. Hincks has truly said, a language which is to Semitic very much what Sanskrit is to Aryan tongues. It was not until our younger scholars began to study Assyrian that we may be said to have known anything in this country of Semitic philology. I have been a member of this Oriental Society for twenty years, I suppose, and it is only within the last ten years that I have seen this new growth. Allow me a little personal reminiscence.

It was the good fortune of having a father who loved the Hebrew language which turned my attention to the Semitic branches of Oriental studies. Under his tuition I began the study of languages with Hebrew. In the theological seminary, not needing instruction in Hebrew, when I wanted to read the Gospels in Syriac and to dabble a very little in the Mishna, I found no one who would have attempted to teach me. In 1868 I purchased the first part of Norris's Assyrian Dictionary, which had just appeared. Now, when every principal university and theological seminary in the country has its professor of Assyrian, it is difficult for

<sup>1</sup> By William Hayes Ward, D. D., LL. D., Editor of *The Independent*.

me to conceive that twenty years ago there was not a single person in the country who had read an Assyrian text, even in a printed book. Indeed the earliest Assyrian type had but just come from the foundry. The French type had been cast for the Imperial Press ten years before, and the Germans had not yet begun either to print or to study Assyrian. A busy life not allowing me to give more than fragments of time to the study, and being unable to pursue the reading of texts, it has yet been to me a great pleasure to watch the growth of a strong school of American students of Assyrian and other Semitic languages. No sooner had Schrader and Delitzsch introduced the study of Assyrian among the strangely dilatory Germans than our own young men, who had begun to go in crowds to the German universities, took up the study with great eagerness. Harvard led the way in the person of Professor Lyon, and Johns Hopkins called the strongest of the younger German scholars to be the head of its Semitic department. Other institutions followed, until now there are in this country more men, I imagine, that offer to teach this language than in all Europe. May I venture to say to them that it is much to be hoped that they will not rest satisfied with doing over what European scholars have done, but will conquer new texts and open fresh fields of study. The new texts brought by the Wolfe expedition to the Metropolitan Museum ought to be eagerly seized by our young experts and immediately translated. Still greater treasures are to be hoped from the new expedition sent out by the University of Pennsylvania, whose first fruits we shall see here to-night. I very much regret that the field, vastly inferior, to be sure, to that in the British Museum, but still well worth study, offered by the tablets which have been for some years in this country, has not yet been entered. I do not remember that a single American text has yet been published by an American scholar. But that reproach will, I am sure, be very speedily wiped away.

Within even fewer years a small, but very active, school of Syriac students has arisen in the United States which has done admirably original work. I will not attempt to detail the new texts translated and published by our fellow members, Drs. Hall, Gottheil and Frothingham, but it is greatly to the credit of our society that they seek so enthusiastically new fields, and add to the world's knowledge of this important literature and of the history connected with it.

The study of Arabic, important as it is, and unusual as have been the advantages from its pursuit by Americans, has been even more neglected by us than that of Syriac. I think the story is true, and it is less than ten years old, that when a student at Harvard offered a thesis on an Arabic subject for his doctor's degree, that institution could not find a professor competent to judge of its quality, and it had to be sent to the sole and only Arabic teacher in the country, Professor Salisbury at Yale. The President of Harvard determined that such a thing should not occur again, and he inaugurated the Semitic department of the university by securing the services of Professor Toy. He now can count one or two younger followers in the study of Arabic, who have yet their spurs to win by original research.

It is the special advantage of Semitic study that it is well within the reach of a good scholar's hope to embrace comfortably the whole circle of Semitic languages. This cannot be hoped by the students of Aryan philology. But the Hebrew languages are little more than dialects. While it is true that Arabic, or Assyrian, or Syriac, or Talmudic, might any of them alone task the best powers of

a scholar, yet any one man of good parts can easily learn to talk Arabic freely, and can easily have read the whole Hebrew literature, considerable Talmudic, the principal Syriac texts, and can be fairly familiar with Assyrian. When we come to the minor branches that exist only in limited inscriptions, a good Hebrew scholar could read the whole extant Phenician literature in a week or two, the Moabite stone in an hour or two, and the Palmyrene in three or four days. For the student of the science of language this is a magnificent advantage. His material is not unwieldy. What American scholar will attempt this task, and give us the completion of what Renan began, and do for the Semitic languages what Bopp did for the Aryan? The wonderful progress of the last ten years greatly encourages me to believe that America will yet lead the world in this study. Our young scholars have already shown great zeal in following the lead of European guides. Will they, like our older Sanskrit students, and like our scholars in the natural sciences, geology, astronomy, botany, zoology, put themselves on a par with their teachers and seek for new discoveries? I believe that the reconnaissance of the Wolfe expedition, and the new, better equipped and manned expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, will prove a stimulus which will be felt in all departments of Semitic study.

The attractiveness of Semitic studies explains the great attention lately paid to them. The world's remaining problems in the history of nations and of religions are to be answered by the students of Semitic languages. There is a current in history and there are outflows and eddies. The swift Euphrates had its multitude of affluent canals which carried its waters to irrigate a limited territory; but he who would study its course might neglect these, and would follow the main, strong river from its mouth back to its source. The study of American languages, of the African languages (except the old Egyptian), of nearly all Turanian languages, of the Chinese and Japanese, or of the history or art of the peoples who spoke them, may be very interesting; but it is the pursuit only of the revolving eddy or of the canal soon exhausted. The great streams of fruitful, self-supplying and enlarging culture only possess supreme interest and importance and must be followed back to their source by those who would learn how man came to be what he is and to have what he possesses. What is the beginning of art? Greek history takes you back to Asia Minor, and from thence you must go back to a Semitic origin. What is the beginning of civilization? You must go back of Greece to Semitic Phenicia, and back of that, again, either to Egypt or to Semitic Babylonia. What is the beginning of religion? Already the classical religions, and those of India and China as well, are proved to be but eddies in the current. The real stream is nothing but Semitic; and it is Semitic studies that must answer the Mosaic problem, and that must explain the source and authority of those beliefs about the creation of the world, the deluge and the dispersion of man which we have inherited from those wonderful chapters of Genesis. I repeat my confidence that our new, young, enthusiastic school of Semitic scholars, which this last ten years has seen arising among us, will have the ambition and patience to contribute much to the solution of these problems.